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The Problem of Declining Enrollment in the Elementary Schools of Todd County

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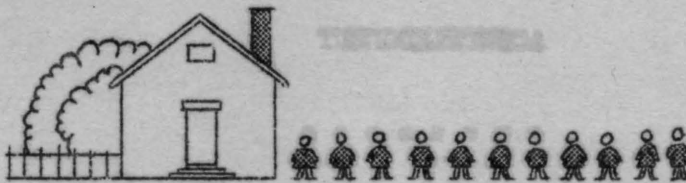
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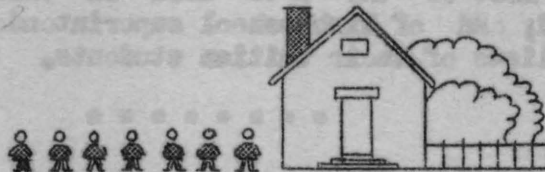
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THE PROBLEM OF DECLINING ENROLLMENT
in
The Elementary Schools
of
Todd County

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Howard M. Sauer
C. Scandrette



In 1934, 1078 pupils were enrolled in the rural schools of Todd county



but in 1940 the total enrollment was only 677

Each figure represents 100 pupils

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

During recent years, enrollments in most South Dakota elementary schools have declined at a very rapid rate. The prevailing type of rural school district organization in most counties has proved rather ineffective in coping with dwindling enrollments and with the consequent high cost per pupil.

It is the purpose of this pamphlet to assist educators, school board members and other Todd county leaders, by analyzing the nature of the problem and by presenting suggestions for its solution; as they have grown out of the experiences of other South Dakota communities. In reading this bulletin it should be born in mind that Todd county is one of the four counties in the state in which the entire county is organized as on school district.

* * * * *

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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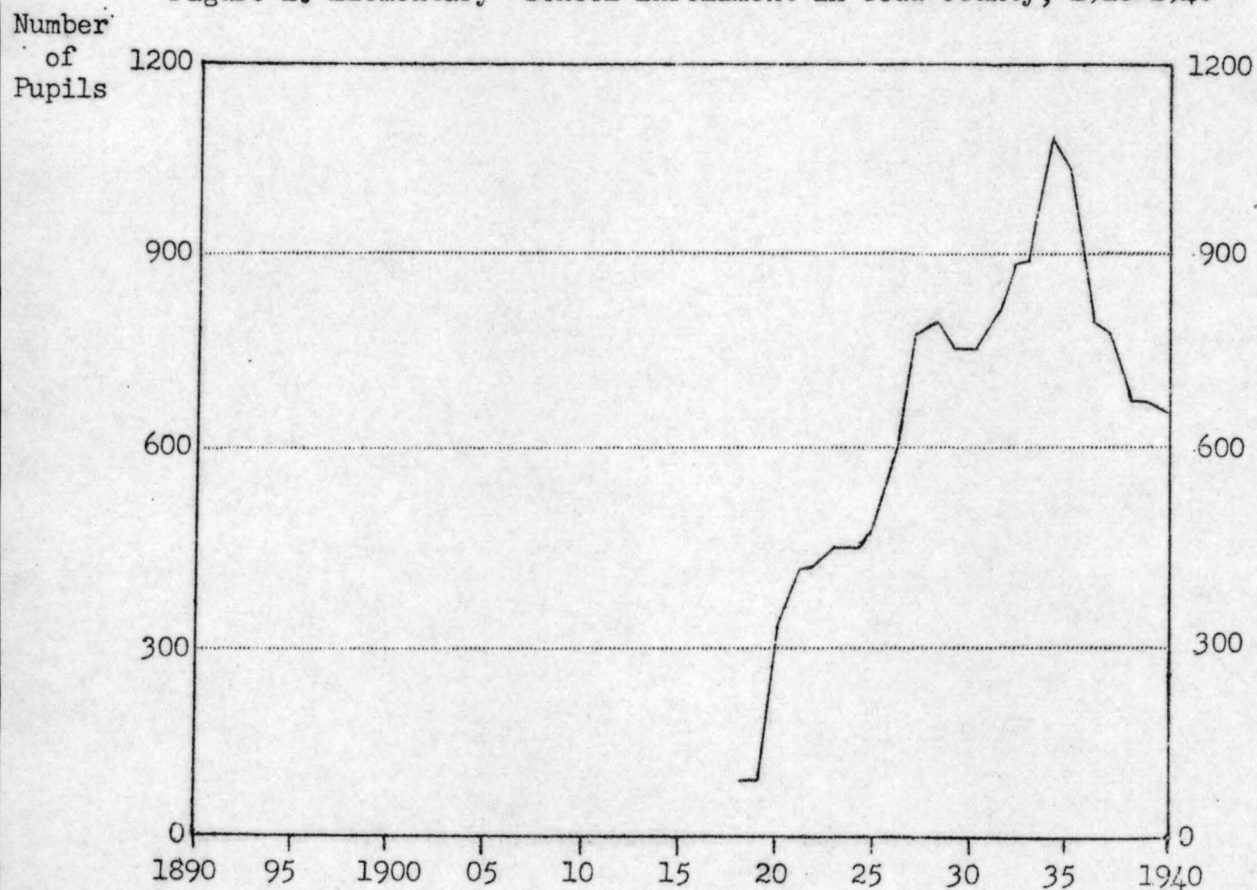
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The Problem of Declining Enrollments in the Elementary Schools of Todd County

Figure 1 indicates the trend of elementary enrollments in Todd county from 1918 to 1940. In 1918 the total enrollment was 191 pupils. This increased rapidly reaching a total of 1,078 pupils in 1934. The following years show an equally rapid decrease until in 1940, the enrollment numbered 676 pupils, or 37.2 percent less than in 1940. Todd county lies within the Rosebud Indian Reservation and while parts of it have been opened to settlement it has a comparatively small white population. Indians are educated in government and private or parochial schools and are not included in the enrollment figures given above.

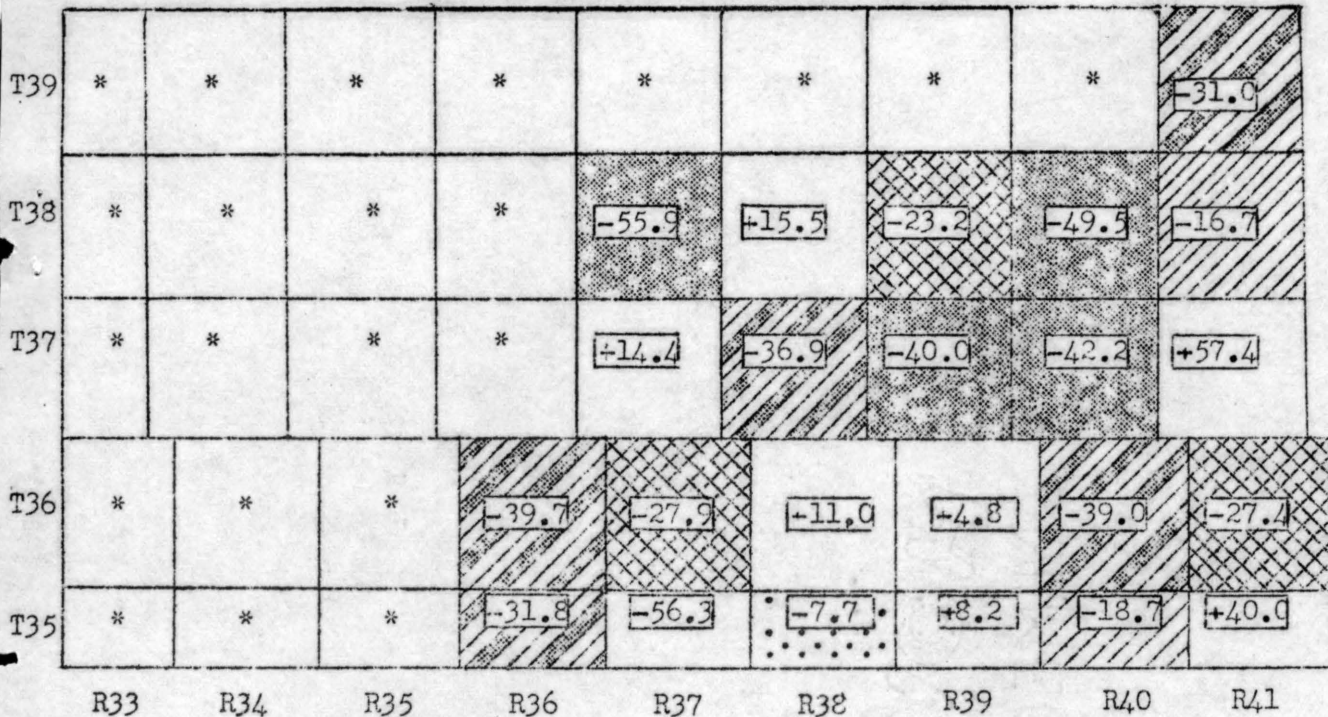
With ranching and sheep raising the chief occupations, in Todd county the population is widely scattered and this creates a serious problem in maintaining adequate schools for the children of the county. The falling birth rate and recent migration have brought about decreases in population and enrollment, which may be expected to continue for some time.

Figure 1. Elementary School Enrollment in Todd County, 1918-1940









Source: Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Figure 2. Population Gains and Losses in Todd County, 1930-1940.



Legend:

-  Gained
-  Lost 0.0 - 9.9%
-  Lost 10.0-19.9%
-  Lost 20.0-29.9%
-  Lost 30.0-39.9%
-  Lost 40.0% or more
- * Incomplete returns

Source: Records of Sixteenth U. S. Census, 1940

The most important factor in elementary enrollment decline is shown in Figure 2, which records the loss of population through outward migration. Between 1930 and 1940 the population loss of Todd County was 3.1 percent. Probably the greater share of this loss was suffered by the white population of the county. Records are not available for all townships but it will be noted that gains and losses vary in those shown and this is undoubtedly true of the entire county. The close relationship between population and enrollment trends is shown by the fact that enrollments increased rapidly during the period of the greatest increase in population and likewise declined when migration brought about the decrease in population. A number of schools have been closed in townships which have had the greatest losses in population.

Figure 3. Elementary School Enrollment in Todd County Districts, 1920, 1930, and 1940.

19 schools	320
54	772
41	676

Legend:

Top figure 1920 enrollment (19 schools)
Middle figure 1930 enrollment (54 schools)
Lower figure 1940 enrollment (41 schools)

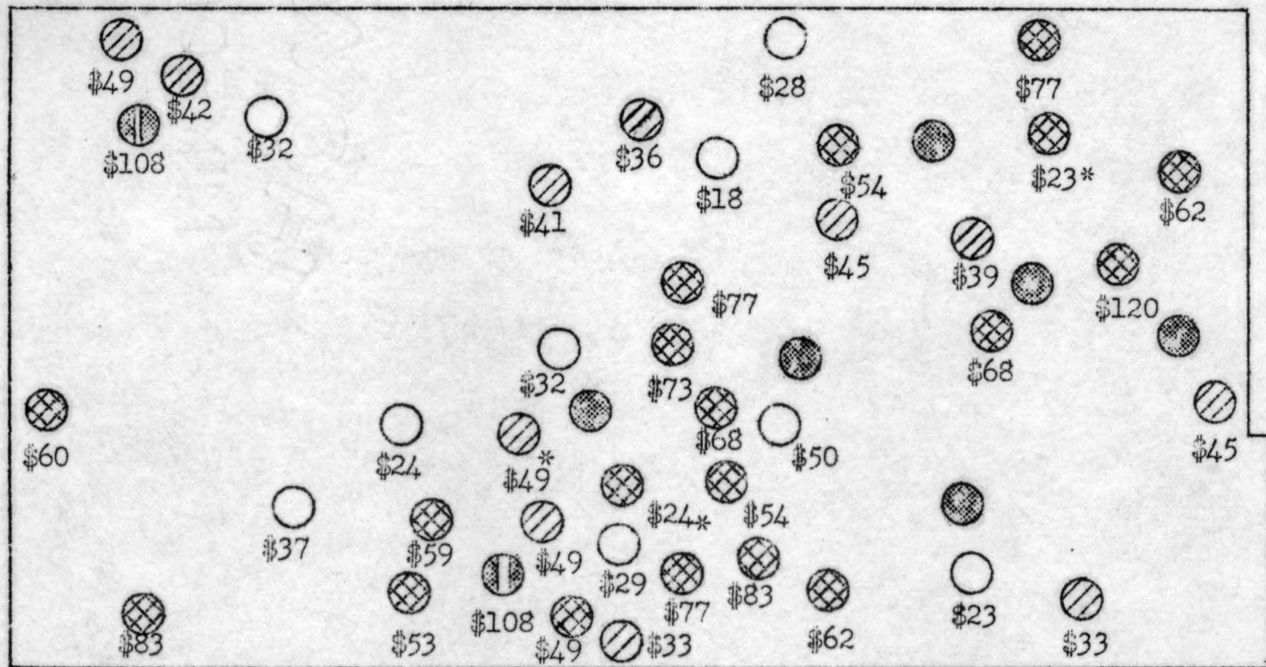
Source: Records of Todd County Superintendent of Schools

In Todd county 41 common schools were in operation in 1940. A four year high school was functioning at Mission, a three year high school at Lake View and two - year high school courses were offered at Littleburg and Midway. The county is organized as one common school district, under one school board with a county superintendent in direct charge of all schools.

Figure 3, (above) lists the total elementary enrollments for Todd county for 1920, 1930 and 1940. It will be noted that a decided decrease has occurred in the enrollment and also in the number of schools in the county. Under the county-wide district system school administration is considerably simplified. When the enrollment of a school falls off the school can be closed and the remaining pupils transferred to another school, if distance permits, without tuition costs. In 1940 there were six closed schools in Todd county; two schools had enrollments of five or fewer pupils; 19 schools enrolled from six to ten pupils; 11 schools enrolled from 11 to 15 pupils; while nine schools had an enrollment of 16 or more pupils.

Future enrollment decreases may not be so marked, but may be expected in the future, unless unforeseen population changes occur.

Figure 4. Instructional Cost Per Pupil By Size of School, Todd County, 1940



Source : Records of Todd County Superintendent of Schools.

As Figure 4 indicates, the cost per pupil in the schools of Todd county vary widely. Schools with the smallest enrollment show the greatest per pupil cost. The cost per pupil of operating the schools of Todd county during the 1939-40 term ranged from \$18 in Mission school which enrolled 103 pupils in the elementary grades to \$120 in Jackson school which enrolled only six pupils.

Table 1(below) indicates that the operation of schools for less than ten pupils is excessively expensive on a cost per pupil basis. Schools with five or fewer pupils illustrate this clearly. The average cost per pupil for the two schools in this group was \$108 as compared with \$26.65, the average cost per pupil in the nine schools that enrolled sixteen or more pupils.

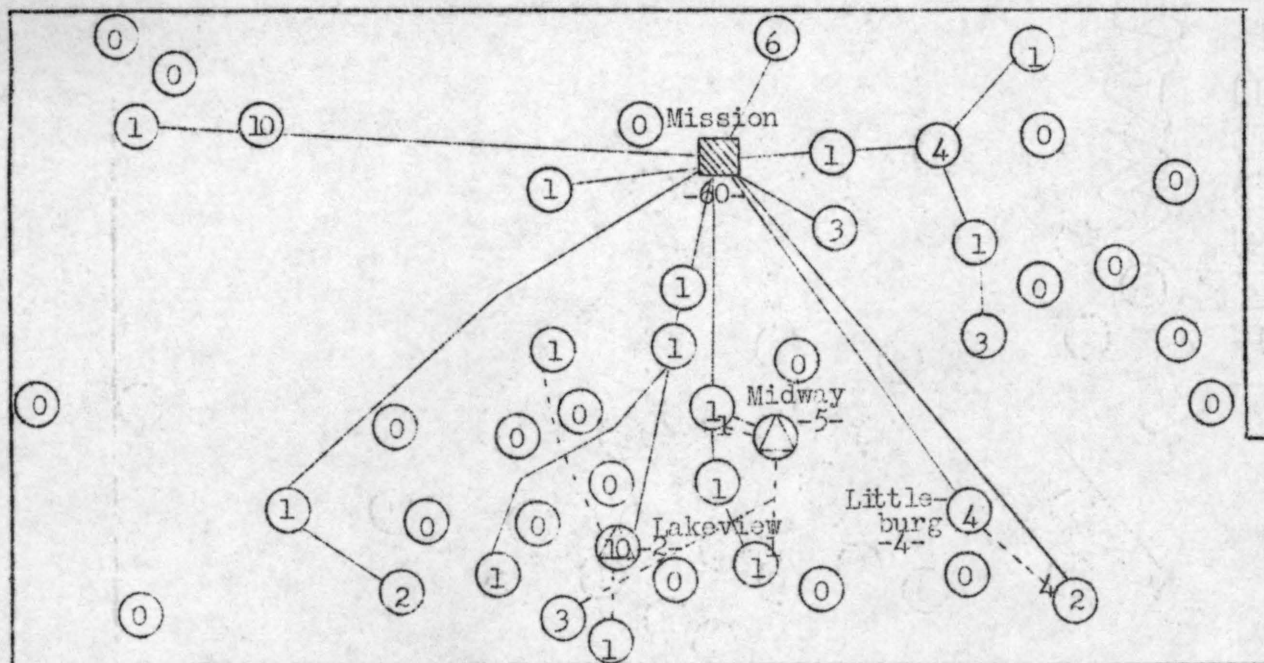
Table 1. Instructional Cost* Per Pupil for Operating Schools Of Various Sizes in Todd County, 1940.

Size of School	Number of Schools	Number of Pupils	Total Cost	Average Cost Per Pupil
Total	47	676	\$26,360.25	\$38.99
Closed schools	6	---	---	---
5 or fewer	2	10	1,080.00	108.00
6 - 10 pupils	19	150	9,426.25	62.84
11 - 15 pupils	11	144	5,939.00	41.24
16 or more pupils	9	372	9,915.00	26.65

* Based on Teachers' salaries only.

Source: Records of the Todd County Superintendent of Schools.

Figure 5. Areas From Which High Schools Drew Their Todd County Tuition Students, 1940



Legend:

- 0- Number of tuition students attending
- Number of tuition students from each school
- Central 4-year high school
- △ Branch two and three-year county high schools

Source: Records of Mission High School Superintendent

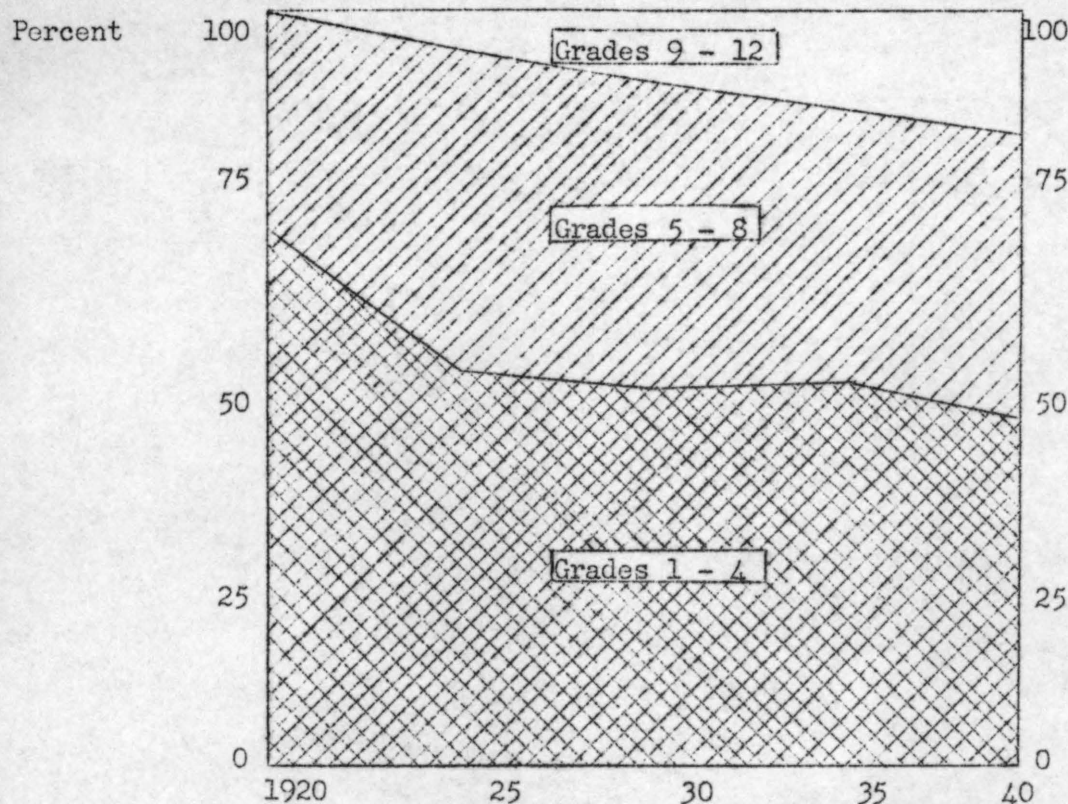
As previously mentioned Todd county is organized on the county-wide district plan. Since the high schools are also included in the same district, there are no tuition costs for high school pupils.

Only one four year high school (Mission) is maintained but a three year course is offered at Lake View and two year courses at Littleburg and Midway. The high school superintendent at Mission has jurisdiction over all the high schools with principals in direct charge of the schools at Midway, Littleburg, and Lake View. As Figure 5 indicates, these high schools draw their attendance from the eighth grade graduates of the various rural schools throughout the county.

This plan for centralized high schools might be practical to some extent for the elementary schools. Rural schools could be closed and the remaining pupils sent to town or village schools already in existence. Where distance and lack of good roads make this plan impractical a centralized rural school might be maintained in place of several schools with small enrollments. These plans would have the advantage of economy and of extending to farm children the superior educational facilities of larger schools.

However, it must be recognized that distances are relatively great in sparsely settled counties such as Todd and the problem of transporting the younger children is not easily solved. These counties may well continue their policy of closing those schools in which enrollments fall below a minimum and of sending their pupils to the nearest school still operating.

Figure 7. Percentage Distribution of Elementary and Secondary Enrollments By Grade Groups, in Todd County, 1920 - 1940.



Source: Biennial Reports of State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Between 1920 and 1940 the proportion enrolled in the first four elementary grades of the Todd county schools shrank from 71.9 to 45.7 percent of the total elementary and secondary enrollment. The explanation for this trend may be found in the fact that birth rates have fallen since 1920. With each successive year there have been fewer pupils entering the first grade. In 1940 the proportions for the first and eighth grades were 30.9 percent and 5.9 percent respectively, as compared with 12.4 and 10.2 percent in 1920. With the reduced number of persons under six years of age it is obvious that elementary enrollments will continue to shrink for a number of years even if the birth rate trend should be reversed.

Figure 7 also shows that the proportion enrolled in high school has increased continuously. In 1920 there were no high schools in Todd county, but in 1925 the high school enrollment accounted for 4.5 percent of the total elementary and secondary enrollment. By 1940 the proportion had increased to 16.1 percent. This trend indicates that an increasingly greater proportion of eighth grade graduates are continuing their education in high school.

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Elementary and Secondary Enrollment By Grades, 1920 - 1940.

Year	Grade											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1920	30.9	14.1	14.4	12.5	7.2	9.1	5.9	5.9	---	---	---	---
1925	16.1	12.9	11.5	11.4	13.1	11.4	8.5	10.6	2.7	1.1	.7	---
1930	14.5	13.0	11.0	11.9	10.9	11.1	10.7	8.0	4.2	2.6	1.2	.9
1935	15.4	12.8	11.4	11.0	9.9	9.5	9.8	7.3	6.2	3.7	2.2	.8
1940	12.4	12.9	9.5	10.9	10.2	7.8	10.0	10.2	6.1	4.5	3.2	2.3

Source: Biennial Reports of State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1920, 1925, 1930, 1935 and 1940.

